

# Porn in the USA

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## Course Description

“Pornography is emphatically part of American culture,” claims Linda Williams, US film scholar and founding mother of the young but by now established field of Porn Studies. Indeed, there is no other country that produces and consumes as much pornographic material as the United States. At the same time, however, America has a troubled history with porn, full of obscenity trials, censorship movements, and moral panics. In this class, our aim is to move beyond a moral judgment of pornography and towards a better analytical understanding of its history, aesthetics, production, consumption, and cultural role. Through critical readings and selected scenes, we will go back to the so-called “Golden Age of Porn” in the 1970s and the “Porn War” it ignited among feminists to then follow porn’s evolution, as a medium and as an industry, into the digital age. In doing so, key concerns will be questions of gender, visual language, technology, audiences, and the significance of representation always with respect to both changes and constants over time.

*A note on content: Please be aware that we will look at sexually explicit material. If you think you are unable to engage with such media in a respectful and scholarly manner, this is not the right course for you. You need to be of legal age to participate.*

## Course Schedule

### Introduction: Welcome to the Wondrous World of Porn (Studies)

#### Suggested Reading:

- Henry Jenkins. 2004. “So you Want to Teach Pornography?” In *More Dirty Looks: Gender, Pornography and Power*, edited by Pamela Church Gibson, 1–8. 2nd ed. London: British Film Institute.
- Constance Penley “A Feminist Teaching Pornography? That’s Like Scopes Teaching Evolution!” In *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, edited by Tristan Taormino, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Constance Penley, Mireille Miller-Young, 179–99. New York: The Feminist Press.

### Week 1: “I know it when I see it” – Defining Pornography

**Screening:** excerpt from *Pornography: A Secret History of Civilisation* (1999)

**Required Reading:**

- Laura Kipnis. 1998. “How to Look at Pornography.” In *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, 161–206.
- Walter Kendrick. 1987. “Origins.” In *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, 1–32. New York: Viking.

**Suggested Listening:** “Porn Will Tear Us Apart.” *The Ersties Podcast*, episode 6.

### Week 2: A Weedy Field? Understanding Porn Studies as a Discipline

**Screening:** selection from “What About Porn Studies,” interview series by Patrick Catuz

**Required Reading:**

- Linda Williams. 2013. “Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field.” *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 24–40.
- Feona Attwood and Clarissa Smith “*Porn Studies: An Introduction.*” *Porn Studies* 1 (1–2): 1–6.

**Suggested Reading:** excerpts from Linda Williams. (1989) 1999. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible.”* University of California Press.

### Week 3: *Deep Throat* and “The Golden Age of Porn”

**Screening:** selection from *Deep Throat* (dir. Gerard Damiano, 1972, 61 min.)

**Required Reading:**

- Eric Schaefer. 2002. “Gauging a Revolution: 16mm Film and the Rise of the Pornographic Feature.” *Cinema Journal* 41 (3): 3–26.
- Susie Bright “The Birth of the Blue Movie Critic.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 32–40.

**Suggested Watching:** *Inside Deep Throat* (2005) and *Lovelace* (2013)

### Week 4: Feminist Porn Wars I: Anti-Porn Feminism

**Screening:** news coverage of the 1979 March on Times Square by Women Against Pornography

**Required Reading:**

- excerpts from Andrea Dworkin. 1981. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women.* New York: Putnam.
- excerpts from Catharine MacKinnon. 1993. *Only Words.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

**Suggested Reading:** excerpts from Carolyn Bronstein *Battling Pornography*

### Week 5: Feminist Porn Wars II: The Feminist Porn Movement

**Screening:**

- MsNaughty “What is Feminist Porn” video compilation
- selected scenes from *Deep Inside Annie Sprinkle* (1981)

**Required Reading:**

- Tristan Taormino et al. 2013. "Introduction: The Politics of Producing Pleasure." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 9–20.
- Candida Royalle. 2013. "What's a Nice Girl Like You..." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 58–69.

**Suggested Reading:** Betty Dodson. 2013. "Porn Wars." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 23–31.

**Week 6: Rocco Siffredi & the Era of Gonzo**

**Screening:** selection from

- *Adventures of Buttman* (1989)
- *Rocco's Perfect Slaves #9* (2016)
- *ROCCO* (2016)

**Required Reading:** Giovanna Maina and Federico Zecca. 2016. "Harder than Fiction: The Stylistic Model of Gonzo Pornography." *Porn Studies* 3 (4): 337–50.

**Suggested Listening:** "John Stagliano: The Father of Gonzo Porn." *Holly Randall Unfiltered*, episode 107, podcast, 1:50:59 hr.

**Week 7: Of Beefcakes & Cocky Boys – Male Gay Porn Then & Now**

**Screening:** selection from

- *Boys in the Sand* (1971)
- *A Night at the Adonis* (1983)
- *Jake Jaxson's All Saints 2* (2018)
- *Brandon Cody & Carter Dane* (2018)

**Required Reading:**

- Michael Lucas. 2006. "On Gay Porn." *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 18 (1).
- excerpts from Lucy Neville. 2018. *Girls Who Like Boys Who Like Boys: Women and Gay Male Erotica and Pornography*. Palgrave Macmillan.

**Suggested Listening:** "Who is Pat Rocco," "John Mercer," "Chris Harder." *Porno Cultures*, podcast.

**Week 8: Feminist Porn Now**

**Screening:**

- *BBC Three* interview with Paulita Pappel "The Porn Star Feminist" (2018)
- *Trinity* (2017)
- selected scenes from *His was first in my Ass* (2015)
- *The Ultimate Kink* (2016)
- *The Bike Club* (2018)

**Required Reading:**

- Laura Mulvey. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn): 6–18
- Lynn Comella. 2013. "From Text to Context: Feminist Porn and the Making of a Market." In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 79–94.

**Suggested Reading:** Rebecca Saunders. 2020. “It’s Like Being Paid to Fuck My Girlfriend’: Alternative Pornographies and Unalienated Labour.” In *Bodies of Work. Dynamics of Virtual Work*. Palgrave Macmillan.

### **Week 9: Race & Porn**

**Screening:** selected scenes from

- *The Opening of Misty Beethoven* (1976)
- *Kitchen Talk* (2018)
- compilation from various recent *Blacked.com* productions

**Required Watching:** “Ask A Porn Star: Listen to Black Performers.” uploaded by Wood Rocket. YouTube, 1:36 hr.

**Required Reading:** excerpts from Mireille Miller-Young. 2014. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

**Suggested Reading:** Celine Shimizu. 2013. “Bound by Expectation: The Racialized Sexuality of Porn Star Keni Styles.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 287–302.

### **Week 10: Fat, Hairy, Trans, Asian? – Fetishizing the Other in Porn**

**Screening:** selected scenes from

- *Sexing the Transman* (2011)
- recent *Shape of Beauty* productions

**Required Reading:**

- April Flores. 2013. Being Fatty D: Size, Beauty, and Embodiment in the Adult Industry.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 279–83.
- Buck Angel. 2013. “The Power of My Vagina.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 284–86.
- Jiz Lee. 2013. Uncategorized: Genderqueer Identity and Performance in Independent and Mainstream Porn.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 273–78.

**Suggested Listening:** “Natassia Dreams: BLACK TRANS SUPERWOMAN.” *The Pornhub Podcast with Asa Akira*, 1:10 min.

### **Week 11: Safe, Sane & Consensual: BDSM Porn**

**Screening:** selected scenes from

- *Feminist & Submissive* (2017)
- on-camera consent from *Kink.com*

**Required Reading:** Gayle Rubin. 1987. “The Leather Menace: Comments on Politics and S/M.” In *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M*, ed. Samois, 2014\_15. Boston: Alyson Publications.

**Suggested Listening:** “OH YES PLEASE with Caritia.” *POV Podcast*, 32:15 min.

### **Week 12: Porn Panics of the Digital Age – on “Pornification” & “Porn Addiction”**

**Screening:** Gail Dines’ TedX talk “Growing Up in a Pornified Culture”

**Required Reading:**

- Valerie Webber and Rebecca Sullivan. 2018. “Constructing a Crisis: Porn Panics and Public Health.” *Porn Studies* 5 (2): 192–96.
- Clarissa Smith and Feona Attwood. 2013. “Emotional Truths and Thrilling Slide Shows: The Resurgence of Antiporn Feminism.” In Taormino et al., *The Feminist Porn Book*, 41–57.

**Suggested Watching:** *Don Jon* (2013)

**Aftercare – Wrap-up, Class Evaluation, Feedback etc.**

**Statement**

This syllabus was designed for an undergraduate class at a German university, taught in 90-minute sessions stretched over 14 weeks. As part of the American Studies program, it focuses exclusively on the US. Since I expected my students to have zero previous experience with the field of *Porn Studies*, I decided to go for a ‘slow start’ to ease them into discussing the topic. Endeavoring to treat porn just like any other study object, I find it important to actually watch porn together. However, that comes with extra challenges that I address openly in class. In my experience, selected scenes of up to 15 minutes accompanied by specific viewing tasks work best. I carefully select the scenes we watch, try to mix alternative and mainstream porn productions, and consciously start with scenes from the 70s because the historical distance, plus the humorous elements, make students feel more comfortable in this new situation. The chronological approach is useful to discuss porn as part of culture overall rather than an isolated entity and to be able to focus on changes and the impact of technological advances. The historical perspective takes away time for other, more contemporary aspects, that I would also like to include: Pornhub, porn parodies, hentai porn, OnlyFans, sex worker rights struggles to name just a few. There is never enough time to cover everything. Some sessions are rather reading-intense, but I stayed away from heavy theory such as Butler or Foucault which I would include in a more advanced group. It is crucial to me to include the voices of sex workers, which I do through texts but also podcasts which take you even closer to the people in the industry. When teaching this class in Berlin, I had the chance to include visits at the Feminist Porn Award, the Pornfilmfestival and a live panel with Jiz Lee, which I would encourage everyone to do who has the privilege of teaching in a place with a porn scene. Most importantly, though, transparency, respect, and a healthy dose of humor are key to teaching a successful porn class.